

PEREGRINE FALCON PREDATION ON AN ALEUTIAN CANADA GOOSE

The diet of the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) consists primarily of birds ranging in size from passerines and shorebirds to grouse and waterfowl (A.C. Bent 1938, *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 170, Washington, DC U.S.A.; D.A. Ratcliffe 1980, *The peregrine falcon*, Buteo Books, Vermillion, SD U.S.A.). Very large prey items include lesser snow goose (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*), brant (*Branta bernicla*), barnacle goose (*B. leucopsis*), and red-breasted goose (*B. ruficollis*) (R.S. Palmer 1988, *Handbook of North American birds*, Vol. 5, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT U.S.A.). Here I describe peregrine predation on the Aleutian Canada goose (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*).

On 12 March 1993, I was observing a flock of approximately 6000 Aleutian Canada and cackling Canada geese (*B. c. minima*) feeding in a pasture near Crescent City, California. At 0807 H about 200 geese flushed and circled over an adjacent pasture. Sixty geese separated from this group and were making a steeply angled, coordinated flight toward the ground when two birds from the group tumbled to the ground. One was a peregrine falcon and the other an Aleutian Canada goose. After impact with the ground, the falcon and goose separated and the goose came to a standing position. The falcon immediately took flight, made a 10 m arc, and quickly struck the standing goose, knocking it onto its back. The peregrine then landed on the breast of the goose and attacked the neck region with its bill. The last movement by the goose was seen at 0812 H. The peregrine falcon fed until 0911 H, after which it left.

The goose was an adult female and had been banded in 1987 as a juvenile. A 10 cm portion of the upper neck was stripped of tissue down to the vertebral column. The abdominal cavity had been opened and the fat surrounding the internal organs consumed by the peregrine. The breast bone was punctured by the falcon revealing organs and tissue inside the thoracic cavity. Fat and muscle tissue of one upper thigh had been partially consumed.

Depending on the sex of the birds, the goose may have weighed from two to three times as much as the falcon. In western North America, male peregrines average 678 g and females 1038 g (R.S. Palmer 1988). Mean body weights of Aleutian Canada geese are 1700–2200 g (D.H. Johnson et al. 1979, *Morphological characteristics of Canada geese in the Pacific flyway*, pages 56–80 in R.L. Jarvis and J.C. Bartonek [Eds.], *Management and biology of Pacific flyway geese: a symposium*, Oregon State Univ. Bookstores, Inc. Corvallis, OR U.S.A.).

Following this encounter, an adult peregrine falcon was seen pursuing Aleutian Canada geese six times during several days in the surrounding area. Twice an individual goose was singled out by the falcon, but escaped by diving into water. The other four times the peregrine gave up the chase.—**Henning C. Stabins, Wildlife Science Group, College of Forest Resources and Washington Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, School of Fisheries, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98125 U.S.A.**